

BOSTON GLOBE
5 April 1985

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 19

A US retaliatory-strike warning for Iran

WILLIAM BEECHER

WASHINGTON - In a remarkable speech that received very little press attention when it was delivered last week, Robert McFarlane, the President's national security adviser, laid out a case for bombing military targets in Iran for terrorist acts committed by pro-Iranian Shiites against Americans in Lebanon.

In a 20-page address to the National Strategy Information Center, a private pro-defense group, McFarlane said the United States should be prepared to employ a "proportional military response against bona fide military targets" in nations that use terrorism as an instrument of policy against US citizens or installations.

In using such force, he continued, the US "need not insist on absolute evidence" that the target struck was used solely to support terrorism, nor that a particular group or individual in that country was directly responsible for the act of terrorism triggering the reprisal.

Then, pointing a rhetorical finger at Iran, he declared there is "sufficient evidence that radical Shia terrorists [in Lebanon] are responsive to Iranian guidance for us to hold Tehran responsible for such attacks against United States' citizens, property and interests."

McFarlane and Secretary of State George Shultz feel strongly that state-supported terrorism is an insidiously new form of warfare and that it requires harsh countermeasures lest it grow out of hand.

He laid out five principles for guidance on the use of military force:

- It must be proportionate to the threat or act of terrorism.
- It must be targeted as precisely as possible.
- Careful judgment must be exercised in deciding where, when and in what kind of situation to retaliate.
- There must be full cooperation with Congress and friendly governments involved.
- It must have a good chance of succeeding.

Some history might be helpful here. Last January after the murder of two French soldiers in Lebanon, Islamic Jihad - believed to be the cover name for pro-Iranian Lebanese Shiites - claimed responsibility for killing the two "spies," said five American hostages would be tried as CIA agents and hinted they, too, would be executed.

The State Department immediately drafted a stiff note, delivered by the Swiss embassy in Tehran, warning that if the Americans were harmed Iran would be held accountable. One of the Americans, TV reporter Jeremy Levin, subsequently escaped. But no trial was held and, so far as is known, no executions carried out.

Senior officials say US intelligence knows of close support by Iran for Shiite terrorists but has no evidence it has issued orders for specific kidnappings or truck-bombings.

Nonetheless, they say if any of the hostages are harmed, the US will be sorely tempted to hit something in Iran. But, they stress, any such action would have to be supportable before world opinion and be of a character that would deter future atrocities, not help the Iranians spur a holy war which would generate more "justifiable" acts of terrorism.

In that regard, they insist there has been no approved contingency plan to strike a military target, as opposed to a terrorist training base or operational headquarters.

But for Iran, which is fighting an escalating air war with Iraq and which has a comparatively small air force, an implicit threat to

knock out one or more of its air bases would presumably be taken very seriously.

If, in fact, Iran is encouraging or masterminding the rash of kidnappings against Americans in Lebanon, and hoping to get as much publicity as it did five years ago out of the diplomatic hostages in Tehran, McFarlane's shot across the bow may cause some serious rethinking of costs versus expected benefits.

And that, perhaps, was the real target of his verbal barrage.

William Beecher is the Globe's diplomatic correspondent.